



VOICES & VISIONS

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Volume 5, Number 1

Spring 2003

Annual Meeting Keynotes to Focus on Building Community

The theme for this year's annual meeting, to be held June 12-14, is *The People Have a Mind to Build* and will explore the Old Testament passage in Nehemiah 4:6 and the New Testament passage from Ephesians 4:12, giving attention to the building up of the body of Christ through relationship, community and leadership. Host for this year's meeting is the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Chattanooga, TN. Keynote speakers will be the Rev. Joyce Hollyday, Associate Conference Minister of the Southeast Conference, and Dr. Kenneth Samuel, Pastor and Founder of Victory Church, a 6000 member congregation in Stone Mountain, Georgia which joined the UCC last year.

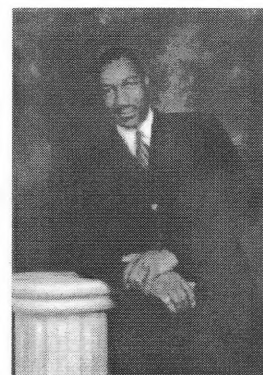


Hollyday will preach the opening sermon on Friday evening entitled, *The People Have a Mind to Build*, from the text of Nehemiah 4:6. With a long history of active involvement in social justice issues, Hollyday will offer insight and vision on building Christian community. Rev. Hollyday is co-founder and co-pastor of Circle of Mercy, a new congregation in the

mountains of western North Carolina, and also serves as co-director of "Rekindle the Gift," an oral history and renewal program among African-American congregations in the Southeast Conference. Hollyday received her Master of Divinity from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University and was ordained to the United Church of Christ in November, 1998. She has also worked as a court advocate for survivors of domestic violence and a chaplain at a children's hospital. Nationally known as a writer and retreat leader, her books include: *Then Shall*

Your Light Rise: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness and Clothed with the Sun: Biblical Women, Social Justice, and Us. She has also written a spiritual autobiography entitled *Turning Toward Home: A Sojourn of Hope*.

Dr. Kenneth Samuel, keynote speaker for Saturday morning, will offer an address titled "Reaching in to Develop Effective Reaching Out - Building the Church through Effective Church Administration." Based on Acts 6, Samuel's theme is developed from his book on church administration planned for publication in May by Pilgrim Press.

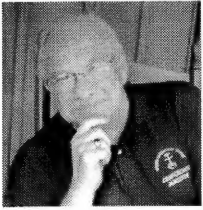


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"I will pour out my Spirit upon all... and your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams." Acts 2:17



A Letter from the Conference Minister

A Voice in the Margins

Dear Friends,

Several months ago I was asked the question, "What does it mean to be a church on the margins in today's world?" This question is often asked in light of the dramatic decline in mainline denominations since the 1960's, almost as if saying defensively, "If we cannot be mainline, we'll be sideline; we will be a church on the margins". The vocations of the churches which joined to form the United Church of Christ have changed over the last two centuries. The Evangelical and Reformed churches were established in this nation to preserve a culture and language. Congregationalism, in its early days, was an establishment church in New England often characterized by an intolerance of religious diversity. The Christian Church began as a frontier revival movement often taking root in small rural settings where believers feared ecclesiastical authority and sought to reassert their freedom and identity as Christians.

Our preceding traditions proclaimed their most authentic voices of faith when they spoke from the margins. Being a church on the margins does not mean we are adopting a defensive posture because of our demographic battering. Quite to the contrast, we can be a positive reclamation of our most vibrant historical moments. The German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania was a church on the margins as the voice of the people scorned and excoriated in a pre-revolutionary Pennsylvania. In a hostile, English-speaking world, this church led its people to pride in their identity. Those who shaped the Evangelical Church were typically not burdened by the same grinding poverty that characterized the early Reformed immigrants, but they spoke from a strong ecumenical impulse not characteristic of 19th century Christianity. Further, as the Gospel of social justice found a voice in an Evangelical pastor in a blue-collar congregation in Detroit named Reinhold Niebuhr, the Evangelical Church was a voice in the margins of the labor movement for the first half of the 20th century.

The Christian Church found its voice from the margins through reformers like Barton Stone, who led the Cane Ridge

Revival. Through this largest revival in American religious history, many were led to new understandings of freedom in Christ. Congregationalism spoke from the margins as it birthed the American Missionary Association (AMA), the largest abolitionist organization in the United States. Throughout the 19th-century the AMA was a movement of fierce courage, calling for great sacrifice and exhibiting great vitality.

Christian historian Martin Marty notes that issues surrounding the inclusion of all people regardless of sexual orientation in the life and leadership of the Christian Church is as divisive to Christianity today as the abolitionist movement was in the 19th-century. Abolitionism and slavery ripped churches asunder, north and south. As we in United Church of Christ address issues of justice and the inclusion of all people equally in our churches, we have a uniquely equipped polity to help us engage in conversations. With a heritage of four distinctive traditions, we experience uniquely blended measures of freedom and responsibility, order and liberty in a way that calls us to live in the seams, in the places in between. This is a dynamic, and sometimes frustrating, place to engage issues of faith and faithfulness. And yet, it is in the seams where we are called to address compelling issues of the day from positions of faithfulness while acknowledging the diversity of convictions within the Christian church.

The call to churches in the Southeast Conference is to be "a church on the margins," one which speaks the word of God's grace in broken places - to those trampled by economic and social shifts, to those who have been "locked out and left out," to those who are "regarded of low estate". In so doing, we must also face our own brokenness and seek the healing that comes when we open our lives to God. As a church on the margins, may we have the courage to speak the truth to the powers and principalities, bringing the Gospel of hope and presence into the world.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs

"Grace to you, and peace..."

Southeast Conference Congregations have Access to Valuable Community Information



The Southeast Conference has recently contracted with Percept to provide ministry resources *free* of charge for every congregation in the Southeast Conference. Percept has been the leading information provider to religious organizations since 1987. Through access to their web site, www.Link2Lead.com, the conference is dedicated to providing you and other leaders with the latest information about your community, hands-on tools to better understand and develop your own capabilities, and a variety of additional resources to support your ministries.

Link2Lead.com is designed to provide you with ongoing access to many practical resources, including the following:

- iChange, a free interactive survey, can be used by you and leaders in your congregation to assess your response to change.
- 10 Facts Series Reports offer instant demographic information for any zip code you select. It's fast, easy and free.
- MinistryMatch allows you to compare the programs offered by your congregation to the list of likely church

program preferences for your community. Based on Percept's national surveys on faith preferences, this is a great resource!

To visit the web site, type <http://www.Link2Lead.com> in the address window of your web browser. The first time you visit to the site, you will need to register to activate the account that has been setup for your church. While you must register, the site is free for you as these resources are made available to you by the Southeast Conference. To complete the registration process, you will need a valid email address. There is no added cost to you or your congregation for use of the web site. Generous discounts are also available on additional Percept resources designed to assist you as a leader in a local congregation.

Explore the resources that are now available to you at Link2Lead.com. This resource can be a stimulating and valuable addition to your ministry. For additional information, contact Rev. Dr. John W. Mingus, Pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, at huntmingus@comcast.net.

Mark Your Calendars!

**The People Have
a Mind to Build**

**Southeast Conference
Annual Meeting
June 13 - 14, 2003**

**Pilgrim Congregational
United Church of Christ
Chattanooga, Tennessee**

VOICES & VISIONS

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

The mission of Voices & Vision is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members.

Editor: Mary Kendrick Moore

Layout Editor: Geraldine Ryons-Hudson

Contributing Editor: Timothy C. Downs

Contributing Writer: Joyce Hollyday

Conference Office:

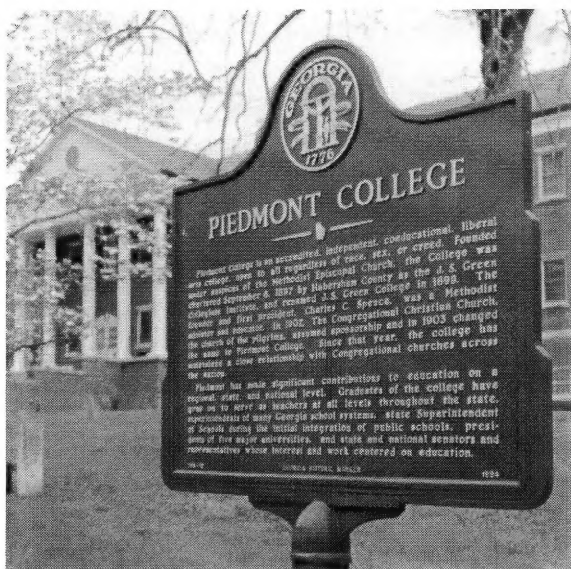
756 West Peachtree Street NW
Atlanta, GA 30308-1138

Phone: 404/607-1993 or 800/807-1993

www.secucc.org

Articles and submissions may be directed to the Editor at mmoore@secucc.org or call 770/941-2048 for assistance.

Newly Affiliated Piedmont College has Much to Offer Southeast Conference Churches and Students



This marker on Piedmont's main campus tells the story of the college's founding in 1897.

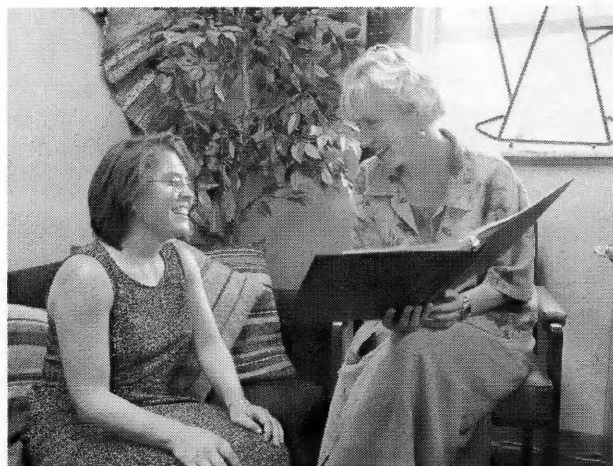
Piedmont College may be newly affiliated with the United Church of Christ, but the campus is familiar to many Southeast Conference churches that have maintained a relationship with the northeast Georgia college for more than 100 years. Originally founded in 1897 by Methodists in the small town of Demorest, Ga., Piedmont was “adopted” by the Congregational American Missionary Association in 1901. In 1957, when most Congregational churches elected to join the United Church of Christ, the college identified with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC), but also retained individual relationships with many UCC churches around the country.

Piedmont President Ray Cleere said the recent decision by the UCC Council for Higher Education to grant full affiliation status to Piedmont restores the historical connection between the college and the UCC. “This will allow us to do more for the UCC churches that have supported us in the past, and it will introduce the college to many new churches, especially here in the South,” he said.

Cleere said the college’s church affiliation works both ways. “Churches in the NACCC and the UCC help support the college financially, and Piedmont in turn offers scholarships for students from member churches. In

recent years, members of the Piedmont faculty have conducted seminars on a variety of topics for the NACCC, and we look forward to providing this service to churches of the UCC,” he said. Piedmont’s chaplain, the Rev. Ashley Cook, said the dual affiliation with the UCC will enable the college to work more closely with Southeast Conference churches. “We are excited about the potential to work with nearby UCC congregations on various projects,” she said.

For those unfamiliar with Piedmont, the college has changed quite a bit since it was founded in what was then an isolated community at the foot of the Appalachian mountains. Piedmont has experienced tremendous growth in recent years and is now a “full-service” college with 2,000 students. Located in Habersham County, Piedmont’s main campus is made up of more than 100 acres of wooded land encircling Demorest Lake. The college includes three residence halls for men and women, and some 350 students live on campus. The college offers undergraduate degrees in 26 major areas in the liberal arts in fields ranging from art to chemistry. New programs added in the last few years include religion and philosophy; nursing (B.S.N.); mass communications; and environmental science. The degree program in religion and philosophy is strengthened by the Butman Chair, an endowed professorship held by the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, internationally known author and preacher.



The Rev. Ashley Cook (right) talks with Megan Dean, a Piedmont student who volunteers to help sight-impaired students at a local high school.

Piedmont's graduate degree programs include early childhood and secondary education, art and music education, public administration, and business administration. The college also offers a sixth-year specialist degree in education for teachers. Undergraduate and graduate courses are also taught at the Piedmont Athens Center, which now enrolls about 500 students, and graduate cohort courses are taught in counties around the college's service area.

Piedmont encourages students to integrate their faith into a variety of academic and social experiences across many religious traditions. All freshmen are involved in volunteer work in the community and participate in national "Make A Difference Day." Social responsibility is also explored through the college's Service-Learning program, in which students can incorporate volunteer work into their academic classes. Numerous student-led religious organizations conduct activities most nights of the week. "The way we approach the whole academic process at Piedmont reflects our association with the UCC and the NACCC," Cook said. "Just as both church bodies emphasize freedom of conscience and individual expression, Piedmont students are given individual attention as they discover their own particular talents."

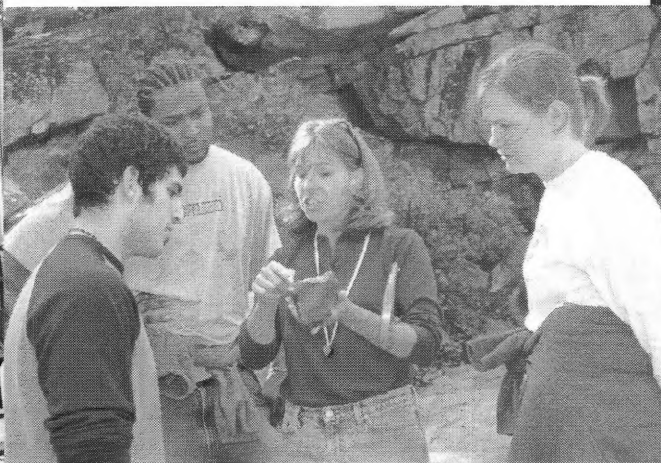


The Piedmont Chamber Singers are a select group of student singers who each year present concerts at the college and at churches across the U.S. during an annual tour. The Singers are pictured here with the new Sewell Pipe Organ in the college Chapel.

In February, Piedmont's Chapel became home to a new congregation comprised of students and members of the surrounding community. Called the Covenant Congregational Church and led by Rev. Cook, the church will ultimately be a fully functioning congregation and afford a unique learning experience for students interested in studying church music.

The church music program recently received a major boost with the installation of a 3,675-pipe, mechanical-action organ in the Chapel. Built by the Casavant Freres company of Canada, the organ is just part of the overall renovation of the Chapel that was completed this fall. Phase two of the renovation, now under way, includes the construction of a one-story addition to house additional music classrooms and a 125-seat performance and rehearsal hall.

Persons interested in learning more about education and community events at Piedmont College are invited to the visit their web site at www.piedmontcollege.edu.



Students in Dr. Debra Dooley's earth sciences classes conduct frequent field trips to geologically interesting sites, including the nearby Tallulah Gorge.



The college's Arrendale library is the centerpiece of the main campus and the place where students go to study and conduct research. The library is part of the statewide Galileo system, which provides access to thousands of online journals and texts. Students also have access to wireless Internet service over most of the campus.

Leadership Convocation to Feature Dr. John Thomas



This year's annual meeting will offer the second annual Leadership Convocation, which began successfully last year by offering a full day workshop prior to the annual meeting. Scheduled for Friday, June 12 the convocation offers ministers and lay leaders throughout the conference an intensive educational experience related to leadership issues in the church.

In his address titled *What Gift Can We Bring?*, Dr. John Thomas, General Minister and President of the UCC, will discuss why the future of the United Church of Christ is important as an essential dimension of God's mission in our culture, in the world, and among our ecumenical partners. "We have something distinctive to offer our culture and we are, therefore, stewards of a gift

that God wants us to offer others," says Dr. Thomas. As stewards, we are called to consider how our leadership may be most effective in sharing the gift of God's grace with others.

Thomas received his Master of Divinity from Yale University Divinity School and also studied at the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. He is an experienced pastor who has been extensively involved in communities where he has served and is engaged in numerous ecumenical activities. Prior to his election as President in 1999, Thomas coordinated the work done by the UCC in national and international settings with other denominations, councils of churches and interfaith groups. He has been a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Office of the World Council of Churches since 1992.

Piedmont College and Southeast Conference Join Hands to Strengthen Youth Ministries

By Betsy Flory

When I joined the Southeast Conference staff last February, I had the daunting task of creating a new ministry. Looking back, I would have been less cautious had I known then what a wonderful resource was available to me through Piedmont College. From the outset, Piedmont has been generous with facilities, funds and the time and energies of their staff. Piedmont's chaplain and director of church relations, Rev. Ashley Cook has offered insight based on her experiences in campus ministry. And when Piedmont graciously offered to host the Conference's Leadership Training Event in preparation for the Regional Youth Event, Ashley quietly and kindly assisted with many details of this, my first, gathering.

When asked about what was most important to her about Piedmont's relationship with the UCC Ashley said, "I feel called to college chaplaincy because college was such an important time in my own faith journey. I love working at Piedmont because there are so many passionate people here who can engage ideas and put them into action. And I am excited because many of those ideas which they put into action are about faith."

Ashley often works closely with Cindy Peterson, Director of External Programs. In Cindy's job of "niche recruitment" for the school, she calls on home-schoolers, private

schools, youth groups and various ministry programs looking for students who might be interested in Piedmont. Cindy draws on a terrific background of church recreation ministry with youth and a love of hiking and backpacking, as well as tremendous energy. Already Piedmont has offered us her time and talents to help plan the Regional Youth Event; to send Cindy and a student, Liz Blake, to lead workshops at the Youth Event; and to plan and lead (along with student Bryan Schroder) our beginner's backpacking trip last fall. Cindy says of her call to the work she does, "God speaks to us in different venues and in different ways, so events like the backpacking trip are very important - we at Piedmont really want to be a resource for the UCC and its ministry." In fact, Piedmont has proven to be such a terrific resource that Cindy has been invited to reprise her workshop, "One Rubber Chicken, 2 Foam Noodles and 3 Sponge Balls: Where Diversity Meets Adventure," in the youth leadership programming at General Synod in Minneapolis this summer. The Conference has been truly blessed by its relationship with Piedmont and its many talented staff and students and looks forward to an engaging future of cooperation.

Betsy Flory is the Director of Youth Ministry for the Southeast Conference and may be reached at bflory@secucc.org or 404-607-1993.

Southeast Conference Ministers Join Interfaith Pilgrimage to Turkey

Last fall, a pilgrimage of 45 Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders to Turkey included two Southeast Conference Ministers – Rev. Budd Friend-Jones, Pastor of Central Congregational Church in Atlanta and Rev. Chris Graham, Pastor of Church of the Savior in Roswell, GA. This inaugural journey of the World Pilgrims, held from October 20-30, 2002, was organized by Rev. Wayne Smith, founding director of The Friendship Force. Guided by the vision, “People who believe in God seeking Common Ground,” World Pilgrims encourages people of different faiths to engage in dialogue and relationship. This pilgrimage, limited to the three Abrahamic traditions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity — included visits in homes, visits to ancient sites of importance to each of the three faith traditions, and conversations with knowledgeable local people. “I was eager to spend ten days in an intense experience with people of Islamic and Jewish backgrounds. For me, this was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. I enjoyed the interactions and observing the different personalities express themselves,” said Friend-Jones.

Graham’s interest in the pilgrimage grew out of his longstanding interest in interfaith dialogue, particularly between Jews and Christians. Having become acutely aware of his lack of understanding of the religion of Islam following 9/11, he was intrigued by the opportunity to travel with 15 Christians, 15 Muslims, and 15 Jews for ten days, hoping to learn more about Islam and Judaism in theory and to get to know adherents of these traditions on a more personal level.

Marked by singing, joke telling, and the sharing of life stories, significant relationships were forged on the

pilgrimage with little tension experienced in creating room for the rituals of each faith. For each day of the trip, pilgrims traveled in different pairs for the opportunity to establish relationships. “I was deeply touched by the genuine spirituality of most of the group, as well as by their disarming openness. We quickly learned that we had a great deal in common, but we enjoyed sharing our differences as well. All of us were teachers and learners at the same time,” said Friend-Jones.

“I believe the work of interfaith ministry will be the most important work of the church in the next decade,” said Graham. “This ministry will include a dialogue that is based not only upon a spirit of tolerance, but of mutual respect for the many paths that lead to the one we name God. I came home from the trip more appreciative of traditions other than my own and, simultaneously, more appreciative of my own tradition.”

Following their travels, the pilgrims wrote a *Declaration of Common Ground* to state their honor and respect for each other’s beliefs, beginning with these words, “We prayed, laughed, wept, argued and celebrated together, openly sharing our personal religious journeys and our faith traditions.” With relationships formed, they covenanted together to “work to build understanding, respect and trust . . . and support each other in our efforts to build interfaith dialogue and cooperation.” Smith hopes to replicate this pilgrimage in many cities across the world in the next few years, with several planned for this spring, including one for youth. For additional information or for application materials, visit the World Pilgrims website at www.worldpilgrims.org.

Youth Happenings

Numerous activities are scheduled for youth throughout the Southeast Conference in the coming months!

- The youth program will mount its first weeklong retreat on spiritual disciplines for young people on April 6-12, 2003 at Red Top Mountain, just north of Atlanta.
- The youth mission trip to Juarez, Mexico is scheduled for July 19-27.

- Plan on attending the youth programming at General Synod in Minneapolis, July 11-15, 2003. Information packets will be sent once they are received from the national office.

Information on all youth retreats and programs were mailed the first of the year. If your church has not received one, please contact Betsy Flory at btflory@aol.com or visit the youth section of the conference web site at www.secucc.org.

Churches Join Hands for Ordination Service



Rev. Betsy Taylor Flory celebrates her ordination at Open Community Church.

Conference Director of Youth Ministry, Betsy Flory, was ordained to the ministry on Sunday, January 5 in a worship service jointly hosted by her home congregation,

Central Congregational Church, and Open Community Korean Church. The deep, earthy sounds of drums called worshipers together and voices in both Korean and English filled the room with song. In addition to conference youth ministry, Betsy serves part time as the Youth Minister at Open Community. In Betsy's ministry, she demonstrates a passionate commitment to cross cultural relationships and crossing barriers of language and culture. Delivering the benediction to close the service, even Betsy's words were Korean!

Highlights of Board of Directors Meeting

The Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference met in Chattanooga, TN on January 11, 2003 at Pilgrim Congregational Church. The Board meets four times each year to conduct the business of the conference and review plans and goals. Highlights of the meeting include:

- The Board welcomed old friends, Karl and Jan White-man, who recently returned from missionary service in Micronesia. They served First UCC in Belvedere, TN before going overseas. Karl and Jan shared news of their work of theological training and the preparation of future leaders of the church. They expressed gratitude for this ministry through which they planted the seeds of the church to come. Karl and Jan noted that while they were in Micronesia, the *One Great Hour of Sharing* offering supported them in their response to four different major disasters.
- The Board engaged in lengthy conversation about this year's \$96,000 short fall in income which is attributed to a 10% decrease in OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Basic Support from local congregations. The first decline in OCWM giving in six years, the Board believes that a number of major non-reoccurring expenses in various churches, coupled with the decrease in investment income, impacted local congregational support. The Board authorized the drafting of a letter to congregations alerting them to the situation and requesting assistance.
- The Board reviewed the Southeast Conference commitment to contribute to OCWM Basic Support to the UCC. They refused to decrease our OCWM contribution from our pledged amount of \$28,000, feeling it is important to set an example for our congregations. Our pledge of 14% of the contributions we receive from local congregations represents a 3% increase over last year. While considering our pledge, it was also noted that the Southeast Conference receives over \$150,000 annually for mission and ministry from the national UCC and partner conferences and congregations.
- The Board authorized the formation of a bylaws review committee to review and suggest any needed revisions.
- The Board made plans for the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference to be held on June 12-14, 2003 at Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga. This year's theme is *The People Have a Mind to Build*, based on Nehemiah 4:6.
- Tim Downs announced a partnership that is beginning to take shape between Eden Theological Seminary, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Piedmont College, and the Southeast Conference to lay the foundation for expanding the TAP (*Theology Among the People*) program. The Conference hopes to call a full-time director this year.
- The Conference is in conversation with Dorian Ross who has agreed to serve as grant writer for the conference as we seek to fund TAP, Rekindle the Gift, and our Youth Ministries.
- For the *Rekindle the Gift* program, there are four additional congregations to visit and Joyce Hollyday will begin writing the book she has been developing on the history of the American Missionary Association in the South.
- New church start strategy continues to expand as we find ministers interested in new church development and congregations that are interested in partnering with them. In addition, we are developing a strategy of outreach to churches throughout the South that are interested in joining the UCC.

CONFERENCE

Concerns & Celebrations

Our Prayers

•*Rev. Angie Wright*, the pastor of Beloved Community UCC, a new church start in Birmingham, lost her home and all her belongings in a fire which took place on December 23rd. Please hold Angie and her two sons in your prayers. Financial contributions which will be used to help Angie rebuild her ministry library and replace her computer may be sent to the Southeast Conference office, marked Angie Wright Fund.

•*Rev. Elaine Sipe*, Pastor of Bethany Congregational UCC, Thomasville, GA, is caring for her mother during a progressively debilitating illness.

•Open Community Korean UCC in Atlanta and First United Church, UCC, in Nashville are currently involved in the search process for new pastors.

•*Rev. Bruce Jayne*, a hospital chaplain in Charleston, SC and member of Circular Congregational Church, UCC, donated one of his kidneys in December, in part out of appreciation for another donor who had, a while ago, donated a kidney for Bruce's son. Bruce is well and the recipient has recovered quickly and well.

•*Rev. Jimmy Fields*, pastor of Plymouth Congregational UCC in Charleston, SC, is recovering from triple bypass surgery.

•*Jay Linter*, Director of the Washington Office of the UCC Office for Church in Society for 10 years, died following an extended struggle with cancer. Linter was well known as an incomparable fighter for peace and justice.

Our Celebrations

•*Rev. Betsy Taylor Flory* was ordained into the Christian Ministry on Sunday, January 5th at Central Congregational UCC. She is called as Director of Youth Ministry for the Southeast Conference, and as Youth Minister for Open Community Korean UCC.

•Covenant Congregational Church (a UCC/NACCCC new church start) celebrated its opening worship service in the chapel of Piedmont College on February 9th at 11:00 a.m. They are led by Rev. Ashley Cook, chaplain at Piedmont.

•*Rev. Warner (Buddy) Noles* celebrated twenty-five years of service as pastor of Russell Woods Congregational Christian UCC in Columbus, GA with announcement of his retirement January 1st.

•*Dr. Ted Trost*, Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama, and Catherine Roach of Tuscaloosa celebrated the birth of their second son, Benjamin Joseph, on January 28th.

•The Service of Installation for *Rev. Stephen Camp* as Conference Minister of the Southern Conference of the UCC was held January 19 in Burlington, NC.

•A Service of Commissioning for *Dr. Anil Henry*, recently appointed to serve as a medical missionary to India, with his wife Theresa, will be held at the Fisk University Chapel on April 26, 2003.

•Ministerial standing has been granted to *Rev. Ashley Cook*, chaplain at Piedmont College in Demorest, GA, *Rev. Joshua Villines*, associate pastor at Virginia Highland Church, and *Rev. Grover Rieger*, member of Pilgrim Congregational UCC. Ecclesiastical endorsement was granted to *Larry Clark* to serve as a chaplain.

Victory Church Plans South African Tour

Victory Church in Stone Mountain, GA is inviting persons across the Southeast Conference to join them on a tour of South Africa. Featuring a Walk to Freedom, a SoWeTo Town Tour, a visit to the Le Sedi Cultural Village and two game drives, the trip offers the opportunity to explore south African culture. Scheduled for February 2-13, 2004, the tour is organized by Lion World Tours in Toronto, Canada and will depart from Atlanta. Reservations must be booked directly with the tour company by December 19, 2003. For additional information, visit Victory's web site at www.victoryfortheworld.org.



Annual Meeting Keynotes

Continued from page 1

A native of Darlington, South Carolina, Samuel is a graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut and received his Master of Divinity from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. In 1996, he earned his Doctor of Ministry Degree from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio and was ordained in 1982. With a ministerial focus in the field of homiletics, Samuel currently teaches in the Religion and Philosophy Department at Clark-Atlanta University. Building Community is important to Samuel, as evidenced in his involvement in agencies such as the Georgia Council on Adult Literacy and the Interfaith Council of Housing, among others. In March of 1987, Samuel was led to organize and found a new church. Situated in Stone Mountain, GA, a growing eastern

suburb of Atlanta, Victory Church seeks to address the total needs of the total person, with the good news of the gospel despite the social, personal, psychological, political, spiritual and/or physical obstacles we face.

Along with our keynote speakers, the annual meeting worship will host a variety of music to be offered by churches in the conference. Plans are underway for youth activities and a display of ministry resources to be offered. Watch for registration packets to be mailed to all churches in April and mark your calendars now to attend and celebrate the growth and ministry of the Southeast Conference.

Conference Calendar

March

- 21-22** **Board of Director's Meeting**, Community Congregational Church, Montgomery, AL
30 **Building Rededication**, Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN

April

- 4-5** **New & Renewing Church Pastor Workshop**, Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA
18 **Good Friday**, Conference Office Closed
20 **Easter Sunday**
25-26 **United Church of Christ Office Support Staff Network Annual Meeting**, First Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA

May

- 2** **ALA/TEN Church & Ministry Committee Meeting**, First Congregational Church, Montgomery, AL
2-3 **ALA/TEN Annual Meeting**, First Congregational Church, Montgomery, AL
12-14 **Graham Cluster**, Epworth-by-the-Sea, St. Simon's Island, GA
26 **Memorial Day**, Conference Office Closed

June

- 12** **TAP Convocation**, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Chattanooga, TN
13 **37th SEC Annual Meeting**, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Chattanooga, TN

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

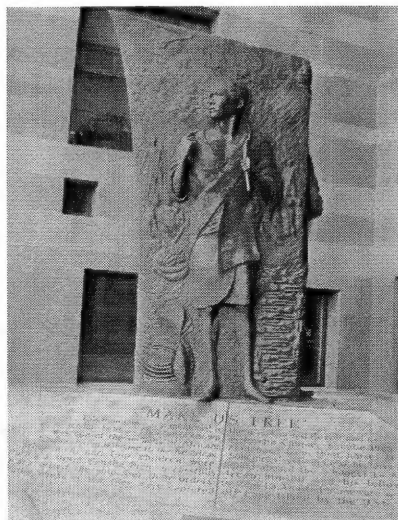
By Joyce Hollyday



Following History's Footsteps

When Susan Mitchell and I walked into the S&P Oyster Company restaurant in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, at lunchtime on Friday, December 6, the hostess said, "What are you, crazy?" This was not a typical greeting. Nor was it a typical day. The morning blanketed the quaint harbor with six inches of snow, and the heavy skies threatening twice that much by the end of the day. But Susan, with her years of winter experience in Chicago, and I with mine in Maine, were undeterred by this wallop of weather. We settled in at a table close to the fireplace, enjoying the panoramic view of the nautical winter wonderland outside.

For a year and a half, Susan and I have been traveling across the Southeast Conference, collecting oral histories in our congregations that grew out of the American Missionary Association tradition, for *Rekindle the Gift*, an inspiring venture that we hope to complete by Easter. The first week of December, our journey led us north as we tracked the early part of the history: the *Amistad* event, which led to the founding of the AMA.



A memorial to Sengbe, leader of the Amistad mutiny, stands at the site of the New Haven jail where the captives were held during their first trial.

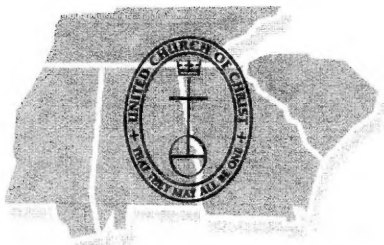
We began our journey on the "Amistad trail" in Hartford. Carol Ganz, whom I met a year ago when I offered thanks at the Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference for its generous support of *Rekindle the Gift*, met us at the History & Genealogy Desk of the Connecticut State Library, where she works. With a pile of books and archival materials, she gave us a strong grounding for the week's travels. From there, we visited the Connecticut Historical Society, which has a compelling permanent exhibit spanning three stories of the building, dedicated to

the *Amistad*. Then we stopped at the Old State House, to visit the courtroom where the first *Amistad* trial took place. Our second day took us to Farmington, where the *Amistad* Africans stayed after they were freed. We went to Riverside Cemetery, where a grave marker tells the story of Foone, who died during the final trial. We walked in the footsteps of history as we visited the homes where the Africans stayed, the Congregational church that welcomed them, and the store above where a school was established for them.

We spent the next day in New Haven, visiting first the Amistad Memorial, located on the downtown green at the site where the jail that first housed the captives was once situated. Completed in 1992, the monument is a wonderful public tribute to a courageous slice of our history. From there we went to the New Haven Colony Historical Society Museum, which contains the original portrait of Sengbe, the leader of the *Amistad* mutiny—a portrait made popular by a UCC poster commemorating the *Amistad* event. We ended our day visiting Rev. John Henry Scott at Dixwell Avenue United Church of Christ, the oldest African-American Congregational church in the nation and a rich repository of abolitionist history.

Ominous reports of the oncoming blizzard moved us to leave that night to arrive at Mystic Seaport ahead of the snow. The next morning, we saw where the 127-foot-long *Amistad* replica was recently built. Exhibits on the walls tell the story of the complicated construction process, and of the wood that was gathered for its hull from Connecticut, South Carolina, and Sierra Leone. A lively video celebrates the March 25, 2000 launch of the schooner. Painted across the ceiling, in sixteen different languages—including Japanese, Swedish, Swahili, and American Sign Language—are the words for "friendship," beginning with the Spanish word *Amistad*.

Over lunch that day, as I sat watching the snow swirl around the gulls and sea, I gave thanks for this journey. The Southeast Conference can be proud that our efforts to record our history are part of a larger commitment to make sure that the *Amistad* story—and the American Missionary Association legacy—live on for generations to come.



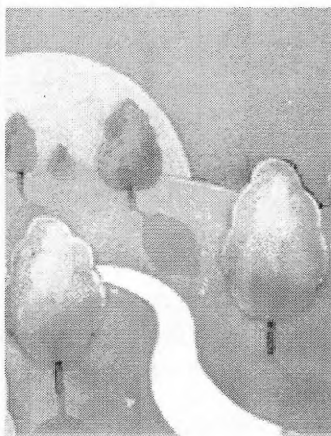
MANY VOICES, ONE IN CHRIST

***Southeast Conference of the
United Church of Christ***

750 West Peachtree Street NW
Atlanta, GA 30308-1132

*Jesus said to Simon Peter,
"Simon, son of John, do
you love me more than
these?" He said to Him,
"Yes, Lord, you know that
I love you." Jesus said to
him, "Feed my sheep."*

John 21:15



*Teach us, O Lord, your way of love,
the way that leads to peace --
the hungry filled, the hurting healed,
and all the captives freed.*

*Into the night of greed and strife
we dare to bring God's light,
Against the power of the wrong
we bring the strength of right.*

*Until all shall know the gift of hope,
and all injustice cease;
until the day of hate is done,
Lord, let us strive for peace.*

*Peggy Haymes
Be Thou Present*